

Korean Cuisine



Korean cuisine is the traditional food of Korea. From the complex Korean royal court cuisine to regional specialties to modern fusion cuisine. The ingredients and preparation are richly varied, and many dishes are becoming internationally popular.

It is based largely on rice, vegetables, meats and tofu (*dubu* in Korean). Traditional Korean meals are named for the number of side dishes (*banchan*) that accompany the ubiquitous steam-cooked short-grain rice, soup, and *kimchi* (fermented, spicy vegetable *banchan*, most commonly cabbage, radish or cucumber). Every meal is accompanied by up to twelve *banchan*.

Korean food is usually seasoned with sesame oil, *doenjang* (fermented soybean paste), soy sauce, salt, garlic, ginger and *gochujang* (red chile paste). Korea is the largest consumer of garlic, ahead of Italy and Southeast Asia.

The cuisine varies seasonally, and especially during winter, relies much on pickled vegetables preserved in big ceramic containers stored underground in the outdoor courtyard. Preparation of Korean food is generally very labor-intensive.

Korean royal cuisine, once only enjoyed by the royal court and the yangban aristocrats of the Joseon period, take hours and days to prepare. It must harmonize warm and cold, hot and mild, rough and soft, solid and liquid, and a balance of presentation colors. It is often served on hand-forged bronzeware. The foods are served in a specific arrangement of small dishes alternating to highlight the shape and color of the ingredients.

Some of these traditional royal cuisines, which can cost as much as US\$250 per person excluding drinks, include serving by exclusive waiters and can be found at high-end restaurants in select locations within the city of Seoul. Imperial cuisine has received a boost in popularity, thanks to Dae Jang Geum, a Korean television drama very popular in many parts of Asia, about a humble girl becoming the royal head chef during the Joseon period.

Korean table settings

Koreans traditionally eat (and many still do eat) seated on cushions at low tables with their legs crossed in a modified lotus position. Some traditional restaurants provide floor chairs with backs.

Meals are eaten with a set of silver chopsticks and a long-handled shallow spoon (similar to the Western spoon, unlike the Chinese soup spoon), together known as *sujeo* in Korean. Unlike other chopstick cultures, Koreans have used spoons since at least the 5th century.

A typical table setting consists of:

steamed rice for each person, in a deep stainless steel or ceramic bowl, usually with a cover

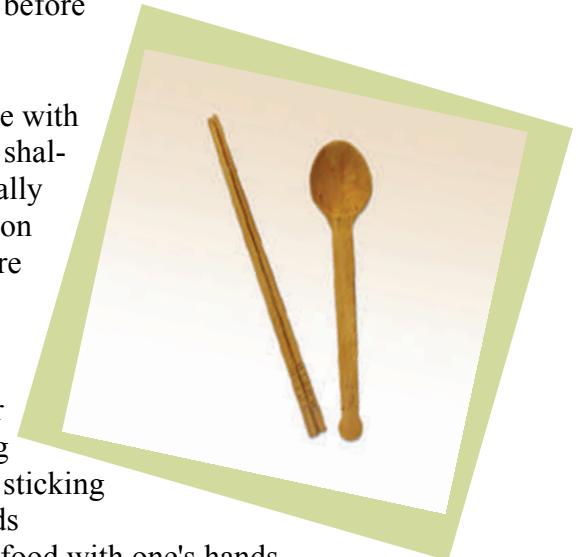
(near left of the diner) hot soup for each person, in a small shallower bowl (to the right of the rice), or sometimes a large, shared pot of soup in the center of the table a set of silver (traditional) or stainless steel spoon for rice and soup, and chopsticks for ban Chan (to the right of the soup) various small bowls of shared bite-sized ban Chan side dishes

Traditional Korean table etiquette

Although there is no prescribed order for eating the many dishes served at a traditional Korean meal, many Koreans start with a small portion of soup before eating the other dishes in any order they wish.

Unlike other chopstick cultures, Koreans do not eat rice with chopsticks only but use *sujeo*, a combination of a long shallow spoon and oval-shaped chopsticks. Koreans generally do not pick up their rice or soup bowls, but leave both on the table and eat from them with spoons. Side dishes are eaten with chopsticks.

Bad manners include blowing one's nose at the table (considered the rudest of acts), picking up chopstick or spoon before the oldest person starts the meal, chewing with an open mouth, talking with food in one's mouth, sticking chopsticks or spoon straight up in a dish, stabbing foods with chopsticks, mixing rice and soup, and picking up food with one's hands (with certain exceptions). In informal situations, these rules are often broken.



Though diners do not need to finish all the shared food that was provided, it is customary to finish one's individual portion of rice. Ban Chan dishes are intended to be finished at each meal, so are presented in small portions and replenished as they are emptied. It is acceptable to ask for refills of any of the side dishes.

Korean foods and dishes

Many Korean ban Chan rely on fermentations for flavor and preservation, resulting in salty and spicy taste.

Certain regions are especially associated with some dishes (for example, the city of Jeonju with *Bibimbap*) either as a place of origin or for a famous regional variety. Restaurants will often use these famous names on their signs or menus (compare Chicago-style pizza).

Basics

Doenjang (or *Dwenjang*) - fermented soybean paste, more pungent than Japanese miso.

Gochujang - hot chili pepper paste

Kimchi (or *Gimchi* or *Kimchee*) - vegetables (usually cabbage, white radish, or cucumber) commonly fermented in a brine of ginger, garlic, green onion and chili pepper. There are infinite varieties (at least as many as there are households), which are served as side dishes. Koreans traditionally made enough *kimchi* to last for the entire winter season, although refrigerators and commercial bottled *kimchi* made this practice less common.

Light dishes

Gimbap (or *Kimbap*) - rice and strips of vegetables, egg, and meat, rolled in seaweed and sliced

into bite-sized pieces. Unlike Japanese maki sushi, ingredients are cooked and seasoned, and rice is seasoned with salt and sesame seed oil.

Mandu - A dumpling typically filled with pork or beef, vegetables, special noodles, tofu and kimchi. These can be prepared boiled, pan-fried, or steamed.

Pajeon - pancake made mostly of eggs and flour, with green onion, oysters, or fresh baby clams cooked on frying pans.

Bindaetteok - pancake made of ground mung beans, with green onions, kimchi, or peppers cooked on frying pans.

Tteok - a chewy cake made from either pounded short-grained rice

metteok - pounded glutinous rice

chaltteok - glutinous rice left whole, without pounding

yaksik - They are served either cold (filled or covered with sweetened mung bean paste, red-bean paste, raisins, a sweetened filling made with sesame seeds, mashed red beans, sweet pumpkin, beans, dates, pine nuts and/or honey), usually served as dessert or snack. Sometimes cooked with thinly-sliced beef, onions, oyster mushrooms, etc. to be served as a light meal.

Main meat dishes

At traditional restaurants, meats are cooked at the center of the table over a charcoal grill, surrounded by various ban Chan and individual rice bowls. The cooked meat is then cut into small pieces and wrapped with fresh lettuce leaves, with rice, thin slice of garlic, *ssamjang* (mixture of *gochujang* and *dwenjang*), and other seasoning.

Bulgogi - thinly sliced beef marinated in soy sauce, sesame seed oil, garlic, sugar, green onions, black pepper and chili pepper, cooked on a grill at the table. Bulgogi literally means "fire meat". Variations include pork (*Dweji bulgogi*), chicken (*Dak bulgogi*), or squid (*Ojingeo bulgogi*). Galbi - pork or beef ribs, cooked on a metal plate over charcoal in the centre of the table. The meat is sliced thicker than *bulgogi*. It is often called "Korean BBQ." A variation using chicken is called (*Dakgalbi*).

Samgyeopsal - unseasoned pork bacon cut from the belly, served in the same fashion as *galbi*. Sometimes cooked on a grill with *kimchee* troughs at either side. Commonly grilled with garlic and onions, dipped in *ssamjang* and wrapped in lettuce leaves.

Hoe - raw seafood dish dipped in *gochujang* sauce, served with lettuce or sesame leaves.

Royal dishes

Gujeolpan - literally "nine-sectioned plate," this very elaborate dish consists of a number of different vegetables and meats served with thin pancakes. It is served only at special occasions such as weddings, and is associated with royalty.

Soups and stews

Budae jjigae ("army base stew") - Soon after the Korean War, meat was scarce in Seoul. Some people made use of surplus foods from US Army bases such as hot dogs, instant ramen or canned ham (such as Spam and incorporated it into a traditional spicy soup. This *budae jjigae* is still popular in South Korea.

Doenjang jjigae - spicy soybean paste soup, served as the main course or served alongside a meat course. It contains a variety of vegetables and shellfish, including small mussels, shrimp and/or large anchovies.



Gamjatang ("potato stew") - a spicy soup with pork spine, vegetables (especially potatoes) and hot peppers. The vertebrae are usually separated. This is often a late night snack but is also served for a lunch or dinner.

Haejangguk - a favorite hangover cure consisting usually of meaty pork spine, dried cabbage, coagulated 'ox blood' (similar to blood pudding), and vegetables in a hearty beef broth. Legend has it that soon after World War II, a restaurant that invented this stew was the only place open in the Jongno district when the curfew at the time lifted at 4 a.m.

Kimchi jjigae - Kimchi with spicy soybean paste in a soup, common lunch meal or accompaniment to a meat course. It is normally served in a stone pot, still boiling when it arrives at the table.

Mae-un tang - a refreshing hot & spicy fish soup.

Samgyetang - a soup made with Cornish Game Hens that are stuffed with sweet rice, jujubes, garlic, and chestnuts. The broth is flavored with ginseng roots. The soup is traditionally eaten in the summer.

Seolleongtang - ox bones and meat, simmered for several hours until the soup is milky-white.

Sundubu jjigae - a thick spicy stew made with soft tofu. Traditionally, the diner cracks a raw egg in it while it's still boiling.



Mixed rice

Bibimbap ("mixed rice") - rice topped with vegetables, beef and egg, and served with a dollop of chili pepper paste. A variation of this dish, *dolsot bibimbap*, is served in a heated stone bowl, in which a raw egg is cooked against the sides of the bowl.

Yukhoe is a popular version, comprising raw beef strips with raw egg and a dash of soy sauce mixed with Asian pear and *gochujang*.

Everything (seasonings, rice and vegetables) is stirred together in one large bowl and eaten with a spoon.

Hoedeopbap \hweh-dup-bahp\ - cubed raw fish mixed with fresh vegetables and rice and *gochujang*.

Naengmyeon - ("cold noodles") - this summer dish consists of several varieties of thin, hand-made buckwheat noodles, and is served in a large bowl with a tangy iced broth, raw julienne vegetables and fruit, and often a boiled egg and cold cooked beef. This is also called *Mul* ("water") *Naengmyeon*, to distinguish *Bibim Naengmyeon*, which has no broth and is mixed with *gochujang*.

Japchae (or *Chapchae*) - stir-fried bean cellophane noodles with lots of garlic, vegetables, and meat.

Jjajangmyeon - A variation on a Chinese noodle dish that is extremely popular in Korea. It is made with a black bean sauce, usually with some sort of meat and a variety of vegetables including zucchini and potatoes.

Kalguksu - boiled flat noodles, usually in a broth made of anchovies and sliced zucchini

Ramyeon - spicy variation of Japanese Ramen, usually cooked with vegetables and meats

Desserts

Songpyeon - chewy stuffed rice cake served at *Chuseok* (Mid-Autumn Festival) decorated with sesame seeds, soybeans, and chestnuts. Honey or another soft, sweet material is found inside.

Korean beverages

Bori cha - roasted barley tea
Oksusu cha - roasted corn tea
Sungnyung - roasted rice tea
Sujeonggwae - persimmon punch
Sikhye - sweet rice beverage
Yujacha - citron tea
Yulmucha - "Job's tears" tea

Compiled by Paula Scott, USU Extension, Salt Lake County

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_cuisine



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